

James Parks, *Workday Minnesota*

WASHINGTON - House Republicans Thursday blocked an effort to extend federal unemployment insurance benefits, making a lapse in benefits all but certain when they expire at the end of the month.

House Democrats tried to speed the extension through by calling for a suspension of the rules, a procedure that requires a two-thirds majority. Although 258 members - a significant majority - supported the bill, the final vote fell short of the needed margin. The bill, H.R.6419, would have extended UI through February 2011 for those who have exhausted 26 weeks of insurance provided by states. It also would provide 100 percent federal funding to state unemployment programs to cover additional costs.

A total of 143 Republicans and 11 Democrats voted against suspending the rules. Twenty-one Republicans voted for it.

Among the eight members of Minnesota's Congressional delegation, Democrats Keith Ellison, Betty McCollum, James Oberstar and Tim Walz voted to suspend the rules and support an extension of benefits.

Republicans Michele Bachmann, John Kline and Erik Paulsen and Democrat Collin Peterson voted no.

Democratic leaders could bring the bill back to the floor under a rule requiring only a simple majority. When the House and Senate wrap up business this week, they will not return until Nov. 29.

If Congress does not act by Nov. 30, 800,000 people unable to find work in an economy with five job hunters for every one job will lose this critical help that keeps a roof over their heads and food on the table. By the end of the year, 2 million jobless will be without help and another 1 million a month will lose their benefits beginning next year.

Two just-released studies by the Department of Labor and the Congressional Budget Office affirm the vital role unemployment insurance has played in combating the recession and rebuilding the economy.

The DOL study found that since mid-2008, the federal unemployment insurance programs have saved 1.6 million jobs in every quarter - averting 1.8 million layoffs per quarter at the height of the economic downturn - and that the programs reduced the unemployment rate by 1.2 percent.

A new CBO study this week echoed the DOL findings, saying that "the extensions of unemployment insurance benefits in the past few years increased both employment and participation in the labor force over what they would otherwise have been in 2009."

Long-term joblessness continues to be a crisis, with 6.2 million workers jobless for six months or more. Nearly 42 percent of unemployed workers have been jobless for 27 weeks or more.

Never before has Congress decided to cut off extended unemployment benefits when the jobless rate was so high, 9.6 percent. And not since the 1930s have so many unemployed job seekers been out of work for so long.